

Definitions

Please refer to the University's Glossary of Terms for policies and procedures.

1. Purpose of procedures

1.1 These procedures provide detailed guidance for students raising grievances and for staff handling student grievances. They adhere to good practice principles for managing student grievances and should be read in conjunction with the Student Grievance Resolution – Governing Policy.

1.2 These procedures address informal resolution and Stage 1 of the Student Grievance Resolution process and should be read in conjunction with the Student Review and Appeals – Procedures, which provide more details on Stages 2, 3 and 4.

2. Managing student grievances

2.1 Student grievances may involve academic decisions, administrative decisions and/or general grievances relating to the student experience for which the student is seeking resolution. The procedures ensure that all grievances are dealt with in a reasonable timeframe and in a supportive environment, without victimisation or intimidation of anyone connected with the grievance either during or consequent to the grievance resolution procedure.

2.2 Group complaints

If several students have the same complaint, those students may act as a group for the initial informal step. When accessing Stages 1 to 4 of the formal grievance process, complainants should submit their own written version of events.

2.3 The procedures make provision for an initial step, where appropriate, for informal resolution followed by four formal stages for resolving student grievances (three internal and one external).

Initial Step: Informal discussion and negotiation through mediation/conciliation

Mediation/conciliation of a student grievance, where appropriate, should occur as early as possible and as close as feasible to the source of dissatisfaction. It involves the step where a student first raises a matter affecting them directly with the respondent through discussion or negotiation. The complainant and respondent should try to reach a mutually acceptable resolution of the student's grievance through an agreed outcome and not by an imposed decision.

Stage 1 Formal Grievance OR notification of a decision (e.g. show cause)

Students may lodge a formal written grievance. Stage 1 may also refer to notification of a University decision, as specified by the University's policies and procedures - for example, a grade; a decision to exclude or terminate for which the student is asked to show cause.

Stage 2 Review

If dissatisfied with the response to a formal grievance, a student may request a review of the outcome of a stage 1 decision. A student's response to a show cause notice is equivalent to seeking a review of a Stage 1 decision.

Stage 3 Internal Appeal

If dissatisfied with the outcome of the review stage, students may lodge an appeal, in accordance with the relevant University's policies and procedures. Appeals regarding academic matters are referred to the Student Academic Appeals Committee, while most other appeals are referred to a more senior decision maker.

Stage 4 – External Appeal

If dissatisfied with the outcome of the internal appeal processes, students may submit an appeal external to the University with the State Ombudsman or similar external body. International Students also have the option of submitting grievances appealing suspension or exclusion to the Australian Department of Education at any point.

3. Conciliation or informal resolution

3.1 Conciliation/Mediation

This is the initial step during which a student may seek to conciliate, mediate, discuss or negotiate a grievance informally with the respondent by:

APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

DESIGNATED OFFICER

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students)

FIRST APPROVED

30 October 2007

LAST AMENDED

6 August 2019

EFFECTIVE START DATE

31 January 2017

REVIEW DATE

6 December 2021

STATUS

Active

- (a) writing, either by letter or email, to the respondent detailing their concerns and asking for the form of resolution they seek,
- (b) requesting that a relevant staff member raise the substance of their grievance directly with the respondent,
- (c) requesting the head of the relevant Unit for a conciliation or mediation session, or
- (d) enlisting assistance from the Student Guild to act on the complainant's behalf in informal discussions with the respondent/s.

While students are encouraged to attempt an informal discussion or negotiation concerning of their grievance first, this may not apply in a number of situations including:

- (a) refund of fees
- (b) credit transfer decisions
- (c) cancellation of enrolment in a program
- (d) academic progress and exclusion

3.2 Maintaining Records

Students should be prepared to discuss the matter to try to reach a mutually acceptable outcome; and should keep their own notes and records of any meetings held and any agreements reached in relation to the grievance.

3.3 Support Person

A student has the right to be accompanied and assisted by a support person in any meeting or conciliation session associated with the initial step and the student should give adequate notice to the person arranging the meeting or conciliation session of the name of any support person who will accompany the student. A support person is a person of choice who may be a friend, colleague or someone appointed by the Student Guild. A student is not entitled to legal representation. Support persons cannot act as advocates.

3.4 Deadlines

3.4.1 For the Complainant

The initial step to resolve a grievance should be commenced by the complainant within twenty (20) business days of the action, incident or event which caused the student to be aggrieved. Where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students) may extend the notification deadline for an informal resolution of a grievance. Any request for an extension and extension granted to a deadline should be made in writing.

3.4.2 For the Respondent:

A respondent to a grievance must acknowledge receipt of the grievance within five (5) business days and advise the complainant of any outcome within ten (10) business days of receipt of grievance. Where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students) may extend the decision deadline for the informal resolution of a grievance. The complainant must be notified in writing of any extension granted to a deadline.

4. Stage 1 – Lodging a formal grievance

4.1 Submission

4.1.1 Where a grievance is unable to be resolved during the initial Step or the student does not wish to participate in a conciliation or mediation session with the respondent, the complainant may commence Stage 1 of the grievance resolution process by submitting a formal written grievance to the relevant University decision-maker, as set out in Schedule A of the Student Grievance Resolution – Governing Policy, within the specified deadlines.

4.1.2 The formal grievance should contain details on:

- the nature of the student's grievance;
- the name of the respondent who has directly affected the student and with whom the student has sought to resolve the matter informally;
- the timelines for events pertinent to the grievance;
- what action has been taken to resolve the matter to date;
- the outcome the student is seeking; and
- additional support material to explain special circumstances not raised previously.

4.1.3 All relevant supporting documentation should be submitted with the formal grievance.

4.2 Deadline for submission of grievance

Unless a specific deadline is prescribed in a University policy such as academic progress, assessment outcomes, fee remissions and show cause notices, a Stage 1 formal grievance must be lodged within 40 business days of the action, incident or event which caused the student to be aggrieved.

4.3 Late submission of Stage 1 grievance

Where a student does not meet the deadline for submission of a grievance, but provides a written explanation together with supporting documentation for the delay in lodgement of the formal grievance, the decision maker may waive the notification deadline for a Stage 1 grievance. The complainant is notified in writing if a waiver is granted or not, including reasons for the decision.

4.4 Student support

A complainant may contact the USC Student Guild for support or the Student Ombudsman for guidance in relation to the procedures to follow.

4.5 Costs

The University does not apply any charge with respect to students who lodge a formal grievance, including requests for review or appeal. A student's current enrolment status will be maintained throughout a grievance resolution process.

5. Procedure for resolving a Stage 1 grievance

5.1 Deadlines for issuing decisions

Receipt of a Stage 1 formal grievances must be acknowledged in writing by the designated decision maker within five (5) business days of receipt by the University. The process to resolve the grievance must commence within 10 business days of receipt, and a decision regarding the grievance must be issued by the decision maker within 15 business days of receipt, setting out the process of investigation followed by the decision maker, the reasons for the decision as well as the details to whom the student may address a request for review.

5.2 Extension of decision deadline

If the relevant decision maker can demonstrate reasonable grounds, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students) may approve an application to extend a decision deadline for the resolution of a grievance. The complainant must be notified by the decision maker in writing of any extension granted to a deadline.

5.3 Records management

Along with a full copy of the student grievance, an official record must be maintained of any decisions made to resolve the matter. Any administrative actions necessary to give effect to the decision must be taken at the time of written notification of the decision.

6. Stage 2 – Requesting a review of a Stage 1 decision

Where a student is dissatisfied with a Stage 1 decision and wishes to request a review of the decision, they should refer to the Student Review and Appeals - Procedures.

7. Responding to Show Cause notices

For the purpose of these procedures, when a student is issued with a show cause notice arising from an academic progress decision, the show cause notice is deemed to be the notification of a Stage 1 decision. Students are given an opportunity to respond to the show cause notice, which is equivalent to seeking a review of a decision as per Stage 2 of the grievance process.

Student Forms and Guidelines

See: <https://www.usc.edu.au/learn/student-support/have-your-say/compliments-complaints-feedback-or-student-grievances>

Staff Guidelines

Staff guidelines and templates are available on MyUSC (staff login required).

<https://my.usc.edu.au/student-success/about-students/evaluation-and-feedback/student-grievance-resolution>

END of PROCEDURES

Appendix A – Summary of Timelines

The respondent is usually the relevant decision maker, as set out in Schedule A of the Student Grievance Resolution – Governing Policy, on behalf of the University.

The University recognises that, in order to ensure a fair and equitable outcome is achieved, complex issues involving multiple parties may take longer to resolve. The Procedures set out how an extension to the deadlines may be approved in extenuating circumstances.

INFORMAL STEP

Attempt informal resolution	Complainant (student)	within 20 business days of the action, incident or event
Acknowledge receipt	Respondent	within 5 business days of receipt of grievance

usc.edu.au/policy

Advise outcome (including setting a date for mediation, if appropriate)	Respondent	within 10 business days of receipt of grievance
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STAGE 1 – FORMAL GRIEVANCE

Lodge formal written grievance	Complainant (student)	within 40 business days of the action, incident or event*
Acknowledge receipt	Respondent	within 5 business days of receipt of grievance by the University
Commence process to resolve	Respondent	within 10 business days of receipt of grievance
Advise decision about grievance OR Issue Show Cause Notice (e.g. unsatisfactory academic progress)	Respondent University	within 15 business days of receipt of grievance OR within 10 business days of the release of grades / executive decision to exclude

STAGE 2 – REVIEW REQUEST

Submit request for review OR Show Cause Response	Complainant (student)	within 20 business days of Stage 1 Decision*/ Show Cause Notice
Acknowledge receipt	Respondent	within 5 business days of receipt of review request/ show cause response
Advise decision	Respondent	within 10 business days of receipt of review request/ show cause response

STAGE 3 – APPEAL

Submit appeal	Complainant (student)	within 10 business days of Stage 2 decision*
Acknowledge receipt	Respondent	within 5 business days of receipt of appeal
Advise decision	Respondent OR Student Academic Appeals Committee	within 10 business days of receipt of appeal OR In the case of hearing by Committee, the process will commence within 10 days of receipt of appeal. All reasonable measures will be taken to finalise the process as soon as practicable. Should the matter be unresolved after 20 Business Days from the date of receipt of the Appeal, the Student will be kept appropriately informed by the committee secretary of the process and its progress.

STAGE 4 – EXTERNAL APPEAL

Notify the University of lodgement of an appeal with an external body, e.g. Queensland Ombudsman	Complainant (student)	within 10 business days of the Stage 3 decision, if excluded for unsatisfactory academic progress or attendance# #All other review requests to external bodies must be lodged in accordance with timelines set by the relevant external body.
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* unless otherwise prescribed in University policy or procedures

END

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Anti-Discrimination and Freedom from Bullying and Harassment (Staff) - Governing Policy
Anti-Discrimination and Freedom from Bullying and Harassment (Students) - Governing Policy
Anti-Discrimination and Freedom from Bullying and Harassment (Students) - Procedures
Equity and Diversity - Governing Policy
Monitoring Academic Progress and Exclusion - Academic Policy
Monitoring Academic Progress and Exclusion - Procedures
Review of Assessment and Final Grade - Procedures
Sexual Harassment Prevention (Students) - Governing Policy
Student Conduct - Governing Policy
Student General Misconduct - Procedures
Student Grievance Resolution - Governing Policy
Student Ombudsman - Operational Policy
Student Review and Appeals - Procedures

LINKED DOCUMENTS

Student Grievance Resolution - Governing Policy

SUPERSEDED DOCUMENTS

Student Complaints and Appeals - Procedures

RELATED LEGISLATION / STANDARDS

Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000
Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015
National Code of Practice Providers of Education ... Overseas Students
USC Student Charter
Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)